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## Fern Avenue Urban Conservation Area [Area 8.3]

### Extent

The Fern Avenue Urban Conservation Area extends along the northern side of Fern Avenue.

### History

The development of this small area occurred relatively late in the history of this part of Windsor, alienated from the Crown in 1850. The earliest development took place close to the Chapel Street commercial area with the establishment of north-south streets, such as Hornby Street, linked by cross streets to Chapel Streets. This was an area where small brick and timber workers cottages were located on small allotments.<sup>112</sup> The early development of this area is shown on Kearney's 1855 map. At this time, there was no development at all along the west side of Williams Road, the later site of the Fern subdivision.<sup>113</sup>

The 1880s and 1890s were periods of rapid development in Windsor, particularly with improvements in the local transport system. The Windsor railway station complex was completed in 1885<sup>114</sup> and a cable tram service was opened along Chapel Street in 1888.<sup>115</sup> Development gradually spread further east from Chapel Street and down towards Dandenong Road. New streets, such as The Avenue and Lewisham Street, were formed. These wider streets in which villas with elaborate detailing were constructed on generous allotments were very different from the narrow earlier streets with their clusters of small cottages on small allotments. The great diversity in housing patterns within the City of Prahran is exemplified by these later Victorian developments. An 1890s MMBW drainage plan shows these changes. There were villas on large allotments also down the west side of Williams Road by this time and, between Erica Street and Wrexham Road, stood the mansion Fern Hill. The grounds of this property extended back to Newry Street.<sup>116</sup>

Part of the grounds of the Williams Road mansion property Fern Hill were subdivided in 1913-1915.<sup>117</sup> The T-shaped Fern Avenue did not go through to Williams Road at this time but stopped at the new rear boundary of the Fern Hill estate. Soon after the remainder of the estate must have been subdivided followed by the introduction of First World War period housing into the full length of the new Fern Avenue. The unity of style and form in the sequence of First World War housing in Fern Avenue may be an indication that it is the work of one builder.<sup>118</sup>

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112. George Tibbits, *History of Prahran*, p.29.

113. James Kearney, *Map of Melbourne and Its Suburbs*, 1855.

114. Nigel Lewis & Associates, *Prahran Character and Conservation Study 1992*, p.33.

115. Betty Malone. *Chapel Street Prahran*. Part One : 1834-1918 p.50.

116. MMBW 1895 drainage plan.

117. Lodged Plan 6633. The mansion is shown on this plan.

118. Nigel Lewis & Associates, *Prahran Character and Conservation Study 1992*, p.35.

## **Description**

The Fern Avenue Urban Conservation Area is a residential street developed in the early years of the twentieth century. The houses are Edwardian in form, most being semi-detached pairs, although there are some detached examples. The character of the street is created by this repetition of forms and the dominance of red brick and terracotta as materials. While architecturally undistinguished and typical of their period, these houses are simply and well designed and detailed.

In form Fern Avenue is a T shaped residential sub-division. The street plantings comprise two large Plane trees near the corner of Williams Road combined with a mixture of larger trees particularly on the northern side of the street where their form has not been affected by overhead powerlines (as has occurred on the south side). The tree species include Liquidambar, Lilly Pilly, a large Birch and examples of another unidentified species. These plantings are typical of the early twentieth century period, although probably all post-date the subdivision and development of the area by some years. The retention of low, predominantly timber or cyclone wire fencing along the street, particularly on the northern side, enables the houses to be seen and retains a character much like that evident during the early years of this precinct. Along the southern side there has been more alteration to the buildings and there is a greater diversity of fence types including low brick fences.

## **Heritage characteristics**

The key heritage characteristics of the Fern Avenue Urban Conservation Area are:

- its First World War Edwardian residential character
- the consistent form, scale and materials throughout the Area
- the retention of street works from the early twentieth century period including bluestone kerb and gutters and street plantings
- the entry to the area from Williams Road
- the form of the area as a T shaped residential street and the closure of the vista along Fern Avenue by Edwardian cottages of a similar period.

## **Analysis**

The extent of the Urban Conservation Area is too narrowly defined. The following elements should be added: the buildings on the corner of Fern Avenue and Williams Road which create an important entry into Fern Avenue and the buildings in Newry Street which close the vista of Fern Avenue. Extension to the area and careful definition of new boundaries could occur at a subsequent stage.

## **Significance**

The Fern Avenue Urban Conservation Area has significance as a relatively intact residential streetscape dating from the period of the First World War and illustrating the Edwardian architectural characteristics of the period.

## Sources

Kearney, James, *Map of Melbourne and Its Suburbs*, 1855.

Nigel Lewis & Associates, *Prahran Character and Conservation Study 1992*, pp. 33, 35.

Lodged Plan 6633.

Malone, Betty, *Chapel Street Prahran. Part One : 1834-1918*, 1983, p.50.

MMBW 1895 drainage plan.

Tibbits, George, *History of Prahran*, p.29.

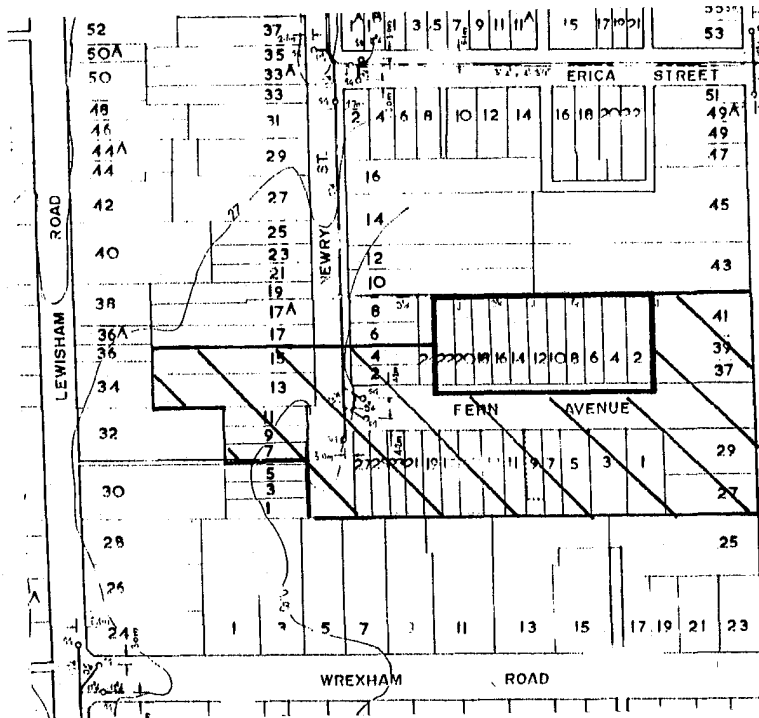
## Recommendations

1. Adopt the UC1 Area as exhibited.
2. Extend the Area to include:
  - the buildings on the corner of Fern Avenue and Williams Road which create an important entry into Fern Avenue
  - the buildings in Newry Street which close the vista of Fern Avenue
  - the buildings on the southern side of Fern Avenue, although more altered, are of a similar period and form, and may relate historically to the development of this street




Further historical research should also explore whether a single developer or builder may be responsible for the majority of building within Fern Avenue.

# Map

## Fern Avenue Urban Conservation Area [Area 8.3]



### Legend

-  Recommended UC1 Area
-  Remove from UC1 Area proposed in Amendment L24
-  Possible future extension

**NOTE:** Where UC1 Area proposed in Am. L24 coincides with the Recommended UC1 Area, only the latter is shown.